



Project-Based Learning for Global Collaboration and Educational Resilience During Crisis: Enhancing Language and Intercultural Skills on eTwinning

Senem Seda Demirtaş¹

¹English Teacher, Türkiye

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic challenged traditional modes of instruction and accelerated the adoption of online, collaborative learning. This paper reports on a project-based learning (PBL) initiative conducted through the European Union Schoolnet Erasmus+ eTwinning platform, where secondary school students engaged in international collaboration during lockdown conditions. This international educational project involved multiple partner schools in a collaborative effort to enhance students' language skills and engagement in a fully virtual environment, transforming passive distance learning into an interactive, student-centered experience. It also addressed pedagogical challenges that arose during the global shift to distance learning. Using a range of Web 2.0 tools (e.g., Canva, Padlet, Zoom) strategically, the project improved students' communication skills in English, digital literacy, and intercultural awareness. Data collected from collaborative activities, student-produced digital outputs, and a final digital magazine demonstrates a significant enhancement of students' English language skills, including active communication and vocabulary usage. Furthermore, the project successfully improved students' creativity, cross-cultural awareness, and their enthusiasm for language learning. The findings underscore that purposeful international collaboration in a virtual space is a highly effective strategy for creating engaging and productive learning environments. They additionally align with existing European Commission studies on eTwinning's role in promoting innovative pedagogy, professional development, and inclusivity, while adding a practitioner-led case study from a pandemic context. The paper argues that teacher-led digital PBL projects are not only feasible under restrictive conditions but also transformative for students' language development and engagement. This article provides a valuable, replicable model for educators seeking to leverage technology and PBL to promote global competencies and overcome the limitations of traditional classroom settings.

Keywords: Project-Based Learning (PBL), eTwinning, Web 2.0 tools, Distance Learning, 21st-Century Skills, Educational Technology.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic radically disrupted education worldwide, forcing schools to adopt distance learning almost overnight. While this created significant challenges such as limited resources, unequal access to technology, and reduced classroom interaction; it also highlighted opportunities for pedagogical innovation. One such approach was Project-Based Learning (PBL) facilitated through international collaboration platforms like eTwinning, an initiative of the European School Education Platform.

eTwinning promotes cross-border cooperation among teachers and students, providing a digital environment for shared projects and intercultural exchange. For many secondary school students, online education was often characterized by passive consumption of content, leading to diminished engagement and reduced opportunities for active language practice. However, PBL changed their point of view. Previous studies demonstrate its positive impact on pupils, teachers, and schools and its role in strengthening teachers' professional practices.

This paper presents a case study of "Enjoy Distance Learning", an eTwinning project, carried out during pandemic lockdowns, focusing on its impact on students' language learning, digital literacy, and intercultural competence. The primary objective was to transform this challenging virtual environment into an interactive, student-centred space, thereby enhancing both language proficiency and essential 21st-century skills among participants. This study validates the efficacy of strategically merging PBL with Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to promote meaningful global collaboration and active student learning.

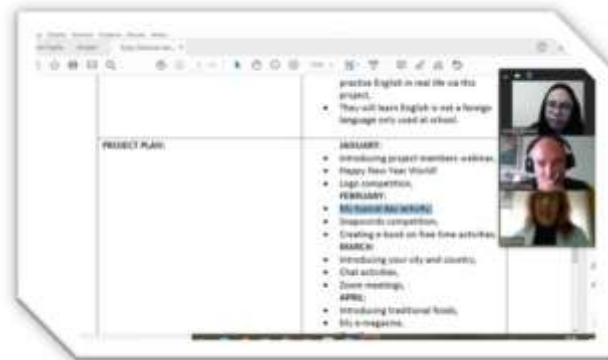


Figure 1: “Enjoy Distance Learning” Teachers’ Meeting on Developing a Common Curriculum

2. Literature Review

2.1 Project-Based Learning in Language Education

PBL emphasizes active, student-centred learning where learners construct knowledge by working on meaningful projects. In language learning, it enables authentic communication, collaboration, and problem-solving. According to the *Study of the impact of eTwinning on participating pupils, teachers and schools* final report of the European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2013), 54% of the eTwinning participant teachers reported in a survey that improving foreign language skills is one of the five main advantages of eTwinning, along with making new friends and networking across Europe (64%), ICT skills (60%), making a positive impact on their pupils’ skills or motivation to learn (55%), and engendering a sense of involvement in an international teaching community (55%) (p. 6).

2.2 eTwinning as a Pedagogical Framework

Since its launch in 2005, eTwinning has become a powerful platform for digital collaboration in schools. European Commission (2013) confirms its contribution to pedagogical innovation and intercultural awareness for both teachers and pupils (p. 6).

3. Methodology

“Enjoy Distance Learning” followed the established Seven Essentials for Project-Based Learning (2010):

1. A Need to Know
2. A Driving Question
3. Student Voice and Choice
4. 21st Century Skills
5. Inquiry and Innovation
6. Feedback and Revision
7. A Publicly Presented Product

Our project directly responded to these essentials, positioning the teacher not merely as a participant, but as a proactive leader who modelled innovation for students and peers alike. This approach ensured a challenging problem, sustained inquiry, authenticity, and public product, all while accommodating severe limitations on in-person contact.

3.1 Context and Participants

“Enjoy Distance Learning (2020-2021)”, an eTwinning international project which was awarded with both National and European Quality Labels, was conducted during pandemic-related school closures, when students had limited access to technology, often only mobile devices and home internet. Despite these challenges, 60 secondary school students from Türkiye (Maraşal Fevzi Çakmak Secondary School, Sultanbeyli, İstanbul and Atatürk Secondary School, Vakıfkebir, Trabzon) and Portugal (AE Dr. Mário Foncesa, Lustosa, Lousada), guided by 4 teachers, collaborated with

international peers via eTwinning, feeling the support of their families and schools. As a result, both students and teachers had a chance to experience distance learning for the first time in their lives. This was the first eTwinning and international project of Maraşal Fevzi Çakmak Secondary School, which made it an eTwinning school. Currently, the school continues to participate in international eTwinning projects.



Figure 2: “Enjoy Distance Learning” on eTwinning Live

3.2 Tools and Activities

Recognizing that online learning requires a conscious shift in methodology, the project focused on students' engagement in collaborative activities through diverse Web 2.0 tools, including Kahoot, Padlet, Prezi, Wix, Logomaker, WordArt, Canva, SurveyMonkey, Renderforest, Powtoon, ChatterPix, YouTube, and CapCut, and synchronous communication platforms, such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and TwinSpace forums. The student-centred activities included cross-cultural art creation, joint digital magazine design, and international webinars, all managed through collaborative discussion and consensus-building on the TwinSpace. Activities included:

- cross-cultural webinars,
- collaborative creative tasks (artwork, digital magazines, videos),
- interactive games and quizzes (ProProfs certifications on e-safety),
- direct communication with peers via TwinSpace forums and TwinMail.

Working with international partners, students collaborated virtually on creative tasks to explore pandemic-related themes and cultural diversity. This approach moved the learning process away from passive video lectures toward collaborative creation. The implementation was characterized by the intensive and strategic use of digital tools. The teacher's role evolved into that of a "collaboration architect," organizing the virtual learning environment, coordinating international partners, and providing continuous technological structure to ensure all students, particularly those newly introduced to distance learning, could actively contribute. This leading role was key to the project's success and subsequent awards of the eTwinning National and European Quality Labels.

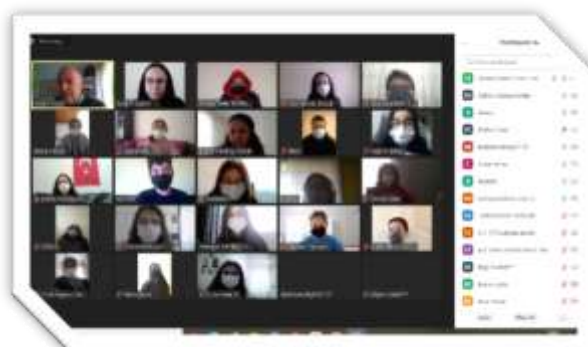


Figure 3: “Enjoy Distance Learning” First Webinar



3.3 Data Collection and Evaluation

As the project founder, I prepared pre- and post-tests and collected parent permissions to ensure effective implementation and ethical practices. Using Google Forms, these multiple choice pre- and post-tests measured if the expectations met the project outcomes and how much the English skills of students improved. The results of the pre- and post- tests and the feedback from colleagues, students, and parents were the main resources of the evaluation of the “Enjoy Distance Learning” project. They were based on:

- pre- and post-tests of language performance,
- student participation logs from webinars and online discussions,
- teacher observations,
- feedback from students and parents.

We followed a qualitative analysis to get feedback. The results showed that the collaborative approach increased students’ motivation, broadened their perspectives on language use beyond the classroom, and improved their English proficiency through authentic communication with foreign peers.

Analysis of the student outcomes revealed significant pedagogical value. The necessity of using English as the sole language of communication within the project, both in written exchanges (Twinmails, forum posts) and spoken interactions (Zoom webinars), provided students with practice chance that is often lacking in traditional curricula. Pre- and post-tests, supplemented by observational data, indicated a measurable improvement in active vocabulary and communication skills. Furthermore, the collaborative requirement inherently built essential soft skills, including conflict resolution, digital literacy, and time management. The final product of the project, a co-created digital magazine, served as a testament to their improved creativity and technical proficiency. Crucially, the project's focus on safety and hygiene awareness during the pandemic, integrated via cross-cultural activities, turned a stressful time into an enjoyable and productive learning experience, shifting students’ perspectives on the utility of English beyond the classroom.

4. Findings

The outcomes of our project suggest that PBL, even under challenging circumstances, can transform language learning into an engaging, intercultural experience. This study offers practical insights and adaptable strategies for teachers seeking to implement PBL to enrich English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction and connect classrooms across borders.

4.1 Language Development

Students demonstrated improved communication skills in English. Participation in authentic exchanges with international peers encouraged fluency, confidence, and real-world language use, confirming European Commission’s (2013) earlier findings on eTwinning’s impact on students’ skills (p. 6). The most important reason for this improvement was students not having any test anxieties.

4.2 Digital Literacy

Through the use of diverse Web 2.0 tools, students became more adept at creating digital content, collaborating online, and managing virtual interactions. These outcomes confirm eTwinning’s role in enhancing teacher and student digital competences.

4.3 Intercultural and Collaborative Skills

Cross-cultural collaboration exposed students to diverse perspectives and led them to respect for cultural differences. The results of another survey conducted by European Commission (2013) shows that among surveyed teachers, 71% of them expected that their pupils’ knowledge of European cultures and countries would improve and 65% of them expected that their pupils’ teamwork and social skills would improve. Both expectations were fulfilled (p. 58).



4.4 Teacher Professional Development

The project also contributed to teacher growth. Designing and leading collaborative activities strengthened project management and curriculum development skills, digital pedagogy, and leadership of the participant teachers of the “Enjoy Distance Learning” project.

5. Discussion

The results highlight the feasibility and benefits of PBL integrated with eTwinning under pandemic conditions. Despite resource limitations, students engaged actively in language learning, digital production, and intercultural exchange.

The findings reflect a unique practitioner-led perspective from the pandemic era. Importantly, the project underscores the adaptability of eTwinning to crisis contexts, showing that teacher initiative and digital tools can sustain high-quality learning even when traditional schooling is disrupted. Moreover, the project contributes to broader discussions about inclusivity and access, illustrating how collaborative online projects can mitigate isolation and create equitable opportunities for students.

The project's impact extended beyond student achievement and served as a crucial catalyst for teacher professional development. By pioneering a successful, award-winning pedagogical model during a crisis, I established a distinguished record of educational leadership. The process of organizing, leading, and obtaining Quality Labels directly validates the professional growth, demonstrating a practical impact on pedagogical practice and skills. Furthermore, the dissemination activities, including a dedicated YouTube channel and school website publications, solidified the contribution's major significance by providing a replicable model for other educators globally.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this case study demonstrates that an innovative PBL framework, effectively integrated with ICT and guided by teacher leadership, can successfully overcome the limitations of distance learning while fostering global competencies. The project not only achieved its primary goal of enhancing language skills and engagement but also validated the potential for international virtual exchange to serve as a critical tool for educational continuity and innovation in any hard times.

Looking ahead, scaling such initiatives could further strengthen the integration of PBL in language education and enhance teacher professional networks. By linking classroom practice to international strategies, projects like this help ensure that innovation is both grounded in local realities and aligned with global educational goals.

REFERENCES

- [1] European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2013). *Study of the impact of eTwinning on participating pupils, teachers and schools – Final report*. Publications Office.
- [2] Larmer, J., & Mergendoller, J. R. (2010). Seven Essentials for Project-Based Learning. *Educational Leadership*, 68(1), 34–37.